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Status Of Child And Family Welfare Programmes
And The Role Of Communication In The Philippines

By

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Status of Child and Family Welfare Programmes and the Role of Communication in the Philippines*

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Introduction

1. This report is based on a cursory scanning of documents and responses from some responsible officials of the Maternal and Child Health Division of the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Agriculture (Bureau of Agricultural Extension) National Nutrition Council, National Media Production Center and Association of Filipino Broadcasters, my experiences as a member of the IEC technical committees of the Population Commission and the National Nutrition Council and consultative meetings of the council for the Welfare of Children. Some insights were also drawn from random interviews with members of households listening to radio programs and viewing television shows, as well as findings from an unpublished Situationer on Literature for Children. As such the report is not exhaustive and does not represent the government's view on the status of the role of communication in the Philippines. For as Director of the Bureau of Family and Child Welfare of the Ministry of Social Services and Development, I can speak with relatively more confidence only in so far as the programmes of the Ministry of Social Services and Development are concerned.

4. The report will consist of two sections, (1) the organizational structure for family and child welfare programmes, including a brief description of such programmes and (2) the role of communication and status of its utilization in these programmes.

Organizational Structure for Family and Child Welfare Programmes

For purposes of this report family and child welfare programmes refer to measures that systematically and consciously aid the parents—both biological and surrogate parents—in meeting the fundamental needs of the child for his physical, mental, emotional, social, and moral development, within the context of a family as the basic institution for such development.

Maternal and child health policies and programmes are developed through the Ministry of Health and associations of private medical and health practitioners. Among the programmes promoting the health of the child are as follows:

- **Pre-natal care** when the health of the unborn child, through care of the mother during her pregnancy, is insured by the provision of free pre-natal services, including information on breast feeding and nutrition.

- **Immunization** as integrated with other maternal and child health programmes to prevent diseases such as tuberculosis, diphtheria, tetanus, whooping cough, polio, measles.
Post-natal care or mothercraft service which includes family planning services to the mother, nutrition education, education for responsible parenthood, pediatric care, first aid, accident-prevention.

Malnutrition Intervention refers to the treatment and rehabilitation of severely undernourished children and nutrition education for parents.

Family Planning Service includes provision of contraceptive devices and maintenance of family planning practice of the target couples.

4. The Ministry of Agriculture through its agricultural extension program provides the farmer and his family with the following services to enhance the welfare of the farmer's children while aiming at agricultural productivity.

Family Life Education for the parents to understand their responsibilities in rearing their children while achieving agricultural productivity;

Early Childhood Education through the Rural Improvement Club Children's Center for mental stimulation and to prepare the farmers child for school;

Youth Development addressed to out-of-school child of the farmer to promote his continuing development outside the classroom, including leadership training, character development, food production;
Malnutrition Prevention to include nutrition education and food production;

Health and Sanitation to support the health and sanitation program of the Ministry of Health;

Family Planning Motivation Service to couples of reproductive age within their target population with emphasis on responsible parenthood and agricultural productivity.

5. The Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD) is charged with the responsibility to formulate policies and programmes and implement the same, to restore and develop the social functioning of the family as the basic institution in the rearing of the child. Specifically those families covered are the socially and economically disadvantaged and, therefore, have less access to resources. The non-governmental organizations and agencies similarly committed to the service of this sector of the population are licensed and provided technical assistance by the MSSD to insure fulfillment of a standard of service. The programmes referred to are classified as follows:

- Self-Employment Assistance which enables the parents and employable members of the family through a non-interest loan and motivational measures to engage in an income producing activity and provide the basic needs of their children, thus helping parents to maintain the children in their own homes and prevent their separation from the family;
Practical Skills Development and Job Placement for parents and employable members of the family, including the disabled, to acquire skills needed for specific job openings within a given geographical coverage;

Day Care Service as a supplement to parental care and prevent maternal deprivation when mother works or when for one reason or the other she cannot take care of a child 0-6 years old. This is done through women with about the same educational background of the mothers mostly volunteer for the common children 0-6 years of age, at a time when parents temporarily cannot provide the needed food and coupled with nutrition education for parents;

Emergency Assistance to help the family head cope with financial difficulties during disasters, social unrest, illness, and other emergency situations and prevent separation of children from the parents before the parents are able to engage in an income producing activity and support the family;

Family Planning Information and Counselling Service to "persuade" couples faced with psycho-social difficulties that prevent the practice of family planning;

Population Awareness and Sex Education for Out-of-School Youth to prepare the youth, who are not reached by the school system, for their role as adults in relation to population and parenthood;
Parent Education Service to continuously inform parents of their relationship with their children and their responsibilities in child rearing in terms of nutrition, immunization, accident-prevention, mental stimulation, recreation, affection, companionship, value inculcation, pediatric care, moral guidance, spiritual development, discipline, drug information, general health and sanitation;

Marital Counselling to assist parents in resolving marital conflicts that tend to dissolve the union and adversely affect the children;

Probation Service for the rehabilitation of the juvenile delinquent and improvement of parent-child relationship while child remains at home and in the community in order to prevent ill effects on the other children;

Protective Service for the maltreated, abandoned, and neglected children, in terms of "admonishing" the erring parent and or temporary removal of child from the home or terminating parental authority when indicated;

Child Placement Program to include adoption, foster care, residential care - as provisions for substitute parental care for an abandoned child or a child whose relationship with parents are legally terminated, or when temporary parental care outside the family is indicated;
Wage Home Placement when a child at an employable age may be placed with a family which would provide the child substitute parental care while he learns a trade and earns;

Home Management Development/Home Aide Service aimed at providing a domestic help (yaya) with knowledge and skills in child rearing and home management to enable her to serve as a substitute mother and insure the well-being of a child in her care.

6. Organized programmes for family and child welfare are primarily addressed to families belonging to the lowest income level, to make certain that those who have less in life are not left behind. The remaining two-thirds of the population depend on their own resources in the development of the family. The target population is estimated at a minimum of 30% of the population of the Philippines or approximately 2.5 million families with about 10 million children.

These families live in the rural areas with heads who are either farmers or fishermen or in slums of urban areas, as laborers or peddlers.

Majority of the parents in these families have completed only three years of education with a maximum family income of only 12,999 ($394) yearly for an average family size of 6 members.
Majority of the mothers work in the farm or outside the home as laundry women or vendors or in handicrafts to supplement the family income, part-time for an average of 3 hours.

Only 20% of the children whose mothers are working are in day care centers. Most of the children are left with their older siblings and grandparents or other adult relations.

Thirty (30%) percent of the children 0-6 years of age are undernourished. Most of them (85%) are breast fed for the first six months.

Most of the school age children, like their parents, are out-of-school (1.8 million youth) after 3 years of schooling and help with earning the family income or with caring for the younger children or simply not doing anything.

Role of Communication in Family and Child Welfare Programmes: Its Status

7. As implied from the characteristics of the target population and the lack of resources for mass communication in the rural areas and slums where the implementation of the family and child welfare programmes is based, the most widely used, if not the only medium used, is the face-to-face dialogue between the representative of government or a non-governmental agency and the audience. There are at most one physician, three nurses, one social worker, one
home management technician in each municipality for an average population of 6,000 families, 30% of which (1,800 families) have priority. Some examples from the experience of the Ministry of Social Services and Development will be presented to illustrate the role of this type of communication in the delivery of some family and child welfare programmes.

8. In many instances the small group is used and preferred because of the number of contacts compared with the individual approach and relative positive effect of group pressure in modifying the reaction/behavior of the individual. The social welfare aide serves as facilitator with some prints and broadcasts developed by the Population Commission as "starter" for the dialogue. This method has been found more effective where the content has a psycho-social flavor e.g. Family Planning Information and Counselling Service for the couples who drop out from practice. Family planning acceptors (couples) belonging to the same neighborhood and social class serve as motivators as they participate in the discussions. The social worker meets the individual/couple separately whenever shame or guilt, hostility, and other reactions are perceived to impede the flow of communication in the group as well as with the individual/couple.

9. Contact with the client for Self-Employment Assistance and Practical Skills Development begins with the accomplishment by the client of a Self-Assessment Questionnaire which in the process
brings in the message that success depends on the person himself and not the worker. The findings reveal clues to the personality of the client and enables the social worker to validate the same and structure the message addressed to his motivation to support his family and consolidate the resources of his family e.g. skills of children who are out-of-school, etc. for the purpose. Whereas there is relatively less of the psycho-social component in this target population the use of group dynamics through pre-cooperative groupings, especially among fishermen, those engaged in cottage industries, etc. to shift communication from the worker to the elected leaderships in the group, apparently resulted in an increase from 45% to 75% success. This preliminary finding is being validated through a strategy called Paluwagan. (cooperation)

In Marital Counselling, the use of the couple's older children or significant others in the extended family, as the communicators - a total family approach - with the social worker as facilitator, is being reconfirmed in resolving conflict. Social work practice, where the techniques of establishing rapport, interviewing, group dynamics, the professional use of oneself etc. are basic can consciously draw lessons from the dynamics of communication. The problem faced in this strategy as in the other cases is the dearth of social workers. There are only 3,402 licensed social workers as of 1980. However, more and more evidence of the effectiveness of the purposive use of "significant others" as
communicators has surfaced. The barangay (village) courts in settling disputes between husband and wife have been using authority of a panel of lay people in the community to counsel couples.

11. Comics (200,000 copies or a copy per 10 families), written in the vernacular for Parent Education on the rights and duties of parents and the rights and duties of children as stipulated in the Child and Youth Welfare Code of the Philippines, is being used in neighborhood parent education assemblies where the contents of the comics are applied in the day to day living of each of the ten families that compose the assembly. The colored and pictorial presentation was reported to have attracted the readers (with three years of schooling) and the experiences among the families in the neighborhood to illustrate the application of the stated duties of parents was reported to have brought the subject to reality situations and to the level of understanding of the audience. The members of the group alternately serve as facilitators within a minimum of eight sessions. The sessions continue whenever there is new subject of interest to the neighborhood since the rights and duties as stated are broad enough to start any exchange on family life, child rearing, and community participation. Once started, much depends on leadership in the neighborhood until the messages result in the desired behavior. In many cases leadership was found to be dormant when the struggle to meet the basic needs is primary. 

As such Parent Education is integrated with the other programmes,
like Self-Employment Assistance, Emergency Assistance, Supplemental Feeding, etc. that provide the basic needs of the family. Leadership also has to be extremely provided externally through volunteers. Yearly a National Parent Education Congress is held in Manila to expose potential leadership and provide incentives through recognition of status of selected volunteers. We have a long way to go with 40,000 villages that have less in communication resources, especially in the use of broadcast since majority of the target families do not even have the means to provide the basic needs for their children and yet are the ones in most need of guidance in rearing of their children. Because of the low level of their ability to write the radio would have been most effective. Radio programmes on family life as presented in short dramas are easy to get.

12. The concept of "distance study" or "school on the air" for nutrition education was attempted. But with 45% of households without radio its utilization as an instrument for communication was limited, especially since most of the primary audience (49.7%) did not have the radio. However its impact has been considered effective with messages remembered by 74% of the audience within 12 months and behavior change recorded at 70%. Another agent has been identified - a volunteer, the Barangay (Village) Nutrition Scholar - who in collaboration with the social worker serves as informant of nutrition in the village while in pursuit of his own means of a livelihood. There are today however only 6,000 villages
with a "nutrition scholar." The volunteer is provided a manual in
comics form which the families can also read. There are 66,000
copies or at least one copy of this manual on nutrition per village.

13. Toys, play, story telling, singing were the primary media
for communicating values and providing mental stimulation to the
child in the day care center. Many of the toys were improvised and
indigenous, and rightly so. Each day care center has at least one
type of toy each on small-size family orientation, nationalism, work
orientation, creativity. Story telling is by word of mouth.
Visuals are not available except through a newly published set of
Children's Book Aklat Adarna composed of 50 titles with the prospect
of increasing the same to 300 titles. These books are mostly written
on Filipino values. But the ingenuity of most day care workers to
appropriately connect these programme media with the cultural values
is lacking and has to be developed, as revealed in licensing
assessments done on about 5,000 day care centers. The potential
of 42,000 day care centers or a minimum of one day care center in
every village, for the socialization or inculcation of values and
the mental stimulation of pre-school children cannot be missed.
The development of the skill in using these program media is a
crucial factor.

14. The generation of adoptive homes for abandoned children
(or foster homes for those who have to be received in care) if these
children have to remain within the country, especially the older ones, should be hastened. The adoption forum is being tested as a tool in the development of the Filipino adoptive homes or in screening out the unsuitable applicant. We have found the use of mass media to have unnecessarily created perceptions which were difficult to reverse even through individual face-to-face interview in the case of questionable motivations. The adoption forum will apply the same principles in communication as those in group dynamics (social group work).

15. The role of communication and the status of its utilization for the remaining two-thirds of the families which are not covered through the family and child welfare programmes of MSSD will be discussed in the report of my colleague, Miss Ester Gajo, Executive Director of the Child Welfare League of the Philippines.